

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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SUBJECT: JOURN-
ALISTS CONDEMN CA DECISION ON PRESS FREEDOM

REF: LAGOS 5368

SUMMARY: JOURNALISTS HAVE CONDEMNED THE CA'S
DECISION NOT TO STRENGTHEN THE PRESS FREEDOM
GUARANTEE IN THE CONSTITUTION. NEVERTHELESS,
AT LEAST IN THE ASSEMBLY, THE ISSUE APPEARS TO
BE A LOST CAUSE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE APRIL 27 DECISION OF THE CONSTITUENT
ASSEMBLY (CA) NOT TO STRENGTHEN THE PRESS FREEDOM
GUARANTEE IN THE CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN CONDEMNED
BY NEWSPAPER OWNERS, JOURNALISTS, AND TRADE
UNIONISTS.

2. IN A STATEMENT ISSUED OVER THE WEEKEND,
ALHAJI LATEEF JAKANDE, PRESIDENT OF THE NEWSPAPER
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PROPRIETORS ASSOCIATION (NIGERIA), DESCRIBED
THE CA'S DECISION AS 'REGRETTABLE,' ALHAJI
JAKANDE'S STATEMENT CONTINUED:

-- 'I UNDERSTAND THAT THE AMENDMENTS TO STRENGTHEN THE
PRESS FREEDOM GUARANTEE FELL VICTIM TO TWO EMOTIONAL
REACTIONS QUITE UNRELATED TO PRESS FREEDOM. ONE WAS THAT THE ANTI-
SHARIA GROUP IN THE ASSEMBLY WHO ARE IN THE MAJORITY,

WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH ALHAJI BABATUNDE JOSE WHO WALKED OUT OF THE ASSEMBLY WITH THE PRO-SHARIA GROUP SOME DAYS AGO. AND IT WAS ALHAJI JOSE WHO MOVED THE FIRST AMENDMENT AFTER REACHING AGREEMENT WITH DR. B.M. AMALAHA AND DR. N. OKORO. HIS MOVING THE AMENDMENT EARNED THE MOTION AUTOMATIC REJECTION BY THE ANTI-SHARIA GROUP.

--"ON THE OTHER HAND, THE PRO-SHARIA GROUP ARE ANGRY WITH THE PRESS OVER THE LATTER'S ATTITUDE TO THEIR BOYCOTT OF THE ASSEMBLY. THEIR ACTION WAS CRITICIZED BY THE MASS MEDIA AND FOR THIS REASON THE GROUP, OR A MAJORITY OF ITS MEMBERS, WOULD NOT SUPPORT THE ENTRENCHMENT OF PRESS FREEDOM IN THE CONSTITUTION TO ANY GREATER EXTENT THAN WAS PROVIDED FOR BY THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE.

--"I ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT BELIEVE THAT THE MEDIA HAS BEEN SUPPORTING THE STUDENTS IN THE CURRENT CRISIS OVER UNIVERSITY FEES. AND THOSE WHO SHARE THIS VIEW AMONG THE ASSEMBLYMEN OBVIOUSLY DID NOT SUPPORT PRESS FREEDOM."

3. ALHAJI JAKANDE CONCLUDED THAT THE STRUGGLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR PRESS FREEDOM WOULD BE INTENSIFIED. DESPITE THE FACT "WE LOST THE BATTLE IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, WE SHALL WIN THE WAR FOR PRESS FREEDOM."

4. IN A SIMILAR VEIN, THE NIGERIAN UNION OF JOURNALISTS (NUJ) DESCRIBED THE CA'S DECISION AS A "SETBACK" AND APPEALED TO ALL NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS TO BE MORE DEDICATED TO THEIR PROFESSION. THE NUJ STATEMENT ADDED, "OUR NEXT IMMEDIATE HOPE TOWARDS THE SAFEGUARD AND PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS IN NIGERIA NOW DEPENDS ON FEARLESS JUDICIARY."

5. IN ITS MAY DAY MESSAGE, THE NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS (NLC) CALLED ON THE CA TO RECONSIDER ITS DECISION AND EXPRESSED ITS SUPPORT FOR THE STAND.

6. COMMENT: DESPITE THEIR PROTESTS, OPPONENTS OF THE CA'S ACTION APPEAR TO RECOGNIZE THAT, AT LEAST WITHIN THE CA, THE DEMAND FOR A STRONGER GUARANTEE OF PRESS FREEDOM IS A LOST CAUSE.

PRACTICALLY ALL ELEMENTS OF THE ASSEMBLY, ALBEIT
FOR DIFFERENT REASONS AS INDICATED IN ALHAJI JAKANDE'S
STATEMENT, HAVE REJECTED THE DEMAND. IF THE DRIVE
FOR A STRONGER GUARANTEE OF PRESS FREEDOM IS TO
BE CONTINUED IN THIS COUNTRY, IT WILL HAVE TO BE
IN ANOTHER FORUM AT A LATER DATE.
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